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## [USNS Mercy Team Display Strong Foundation of Medical Readiness during Pacific Partnership](#)

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*By Rear Adm. Bruce L. Gillingham, commander, Navy Medicine West*



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Last month, I joined hundreds of families in bidding a teary, yet proud “fair winds and following seas” to 600-plus Sailors aboard the USNS Mercy hospital ship, as they pulled away from the Naval Base San Diego pier bound for Southeast Asia and Oceania in support of U.S. Pacific Fleet’s 10<sup>th</sup> multi-national Pacific Partnership mission.

While saying goodbye to one’s family for a four-month deployment is never easy, we do it because of the unique contribution that military medical professionals, linked arm in arm with dedicated interagency partners and civilian volunteers, can make to global security and stability. Armed with nothing more than a smile, a sincere desire to share their medical expertise and the support of several partner nations, the Mercy crew will provide care in four host nations — Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Building on the lessons learned from their predecessors aboard prior Pacific Partnership and Continuing Promise missions, the Mercy team will provide medical and surgical care and will participate in cooperative health engagements in several locations in each host country with the goal of developing enhanced health care capacity, capability and resiliency for everyone involved.



Through it all, an atmosphere of collaboration and friendship prevailed.

Throughout the past decade, the medical personnel supporting Pacific Partnership have provided care to nearly 270,000 people, veterinary care to more than 38,000 animals, and have literally spent thousands of hours participating in medical conferences with their host nation counterparts, sharing best practices and developing solutions for local medical challenges. The care, compassion and professionalism demonstrated by the crew also builds a framework of mutual respect and admiration, enhancing the trust between our nations and contributing in a very tangible way to United States Pacific Command's goals for regional security and stability.



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It was my good fortune to join the Mercy during its first stop in Suva, Fiji. The extremely motivated crew hit the ground running, setting up an extremely well attended health fair; providing medical consultations; performing several complex reconstructive surgeries; running a dental clinic in an elementary school; participating in a cooperative health exchange with local eye care professionals, and

sharing lessons learned in a disaster relief symposium to cite just a fraction of the events that occurred. Fijian medical professionals were integrated into all aspects of the visit providing valuable insights and perspectives to their American counterparts. Through it all, an atmosphere of collaboration and friendship prevailed. As the Mercy pulled away from the pier on its way to Savusavu, Fiji, the goodwill she and her crew left in their wake was palpable.



Missions like Pacific Partnership and Continuing Promise, which is carried out by USNS Comfort in the Caribbean and South America, not only help the men and women of Navy Medicine keep their readiness edge, but make an important contribution to preserving stability in the global commons.

None of this would have been possible without a strong foundation of medical readiness. For more than 237 years, Navy Medicine has provided the Sailors and Marines of our operational forces with the expertise and forward medical presence required to support our Navy's strategic objectives. In a phrase, Navy Medicine is a "ready medical force that produces force medical readiness." Missions like Pacific Partnership and Continuing Promise, which is carried out by USNS Comfort in the Caribbean and South America, not only help the men and women of Navy Medicine keep their readiness edge, but make an important contribution to preserving stability in the global commons.